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TEESL: An (Im)morality Tale

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Chapter 1 by intellikat

Teaching Earthspoken English as a Second Language. TEESL. The opportunity presented itself like a rescue grapple in zero gravity.

My grandparents had paid my way through the first two years of Starfleet Academy. Gramps himself was a decorated captain (retired), but I was decorated in a different way: I spent most of my days (and nights) partying. About the same time the old geezers informed me they would not be paying off my final year's credit balance on tuition and "living expenses", I learned I was also going to be a father. With two separate girls. Who-ee.

And so I self-ejected from that life and returned home only to find it empty and up for sale. My parents are ultra-conservation religionists and had apparently departed one month earlier for to live on a commune in the radioactive wastelands without telling anyone. I had hoped to reclaim and sell a stash of antique Kraftwerk albums on vinyl from the cellar to fund my empty coffers, but instead I found them broken and melted into blackened humps in a burn bin in the backyard: no doubt some self-sacrifice by my parents in resignation of their suburban life even though the records belonged to me. Harder still, I found out later they had shaved and taken

the family dog with them to be baptized into the commune. I loved that dog.

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Credit-less and dejected, I walked directly into the nearest recruitment office and signed two years of my young life away.

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ask My grandparents having cut me off without my knowing it, school debts were already accruing interest and the

holder of those loans (Manny Futt) was in pursuit to collect. Quite literally. Things have gotten even worse in this respect since even the part of the century. Hard to believe, I know, yet true.

Neither the recruiting agency nor the language center I would be teaching for paid spacefare, so at about 22:00 hours I was propped up in Major Tom's Cantina bargaining for transport to what would be the wildest party I could have ever imagined.

Chapter 2 by Harlander



If you wanted to do business with spacers of the less-legitimate persuasion, Major Tom's was the place to be. Plenty of "no questions asked" had been sold under its blacklights (which the owner still thought were cool despite the 1960s being over two hundred years ago).

It was also a pretty hot venue if you were into xenomusic. Right now a multi-species live band was playing, so the twirling strains of post-neo-melodic-jazz-metal outfit *Vertebrata Adorabilis* filled the bar. The Ophidian bassist kept giving me meaningful looks over her overdriven quadruple bass. She wasn't hard on the eye for someone with no hair and a body covered in scales, but I've been with Ophidians before. They like to constrict when they get excited, and last time I ended up in the hospital for a fortnight. Besides, I wasn't here to score.

I was looking for a worked passage. That limited the kinds of people I'd be dealing with. Most ships plying the Earthsphere were AI-run, and it was pretty hard to bluff 'em. (I seduced one once, but that was special circumstances. And back in the hospital after that one, too.) Besides, they didn't tend to drink in starport bars.

I'd talked to about five captains as midnight was creeping around. None of them had been interested, my two years of Academy training notwithstanding.

I'd sunk to the level of talking to a Voloch. Lovely people (beings? Whatever), but even the human-atmosphere sections of their ships stank of the breathing mix they used, which I'm sure contained the same stuff that wafts off rotting corpses.

The Voloch have three hands, each with eight stubby fingers. One of those fingers is held in my direction.

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"You small!" he grunted.

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"Look, I've got two years at the Academy, and engineering was my best subject!" Well, it was the subject it was easiest to steal test answers for, anyway.

"Hah! *Pe tuko sché!* Get outta here!" Xe was just about to turn back to xis drink-tube when the bassist slithered up. I'd been so busy trying to deal that I hadn't noticed their set finishing.

"Hello, you!" She leaned against me, wrapping her arms around my shoulders. I managed not to flinch. Actually the scales feel pretty nice, it's just.. I'm drifting.

"Oh, hey, you've met Bukko," she said, nodding to the Voloch. "You know him?" I asked. "Oh, yeah, he's our driver."

A way out of my current situation began occurring to me. And hey, it'd only cost a broken rib or two.

Chapter 3 by Harlander



I drifted gently awake in zero gravity. Something cool and smooth was wrapped tightly around my naked body. A sensation of satiated contentment suffused my whole being. My lasting concerns, the long journey to the language centre and all the pursuits and dramas of my Earthbound life seemed so distant as to be immaterial. I felt as if I could happily remain as I was forever.

Then the pain started. It began as a dull ache in my joints. Nothing more than the twinge of a few hours' enthusiastic exercise, I was sure. Then I felt the sharp, stabbing burst of agony in my chest, and my eyes snapped open as a shrill shriek escaped my lips.

The smooth, cool wrapping was the sleeping form of Cilestia, the bassist from *Vertebrata Adorabilis*. Her scaly head rested against my neck, her blissful smile only spoiled by the tips of her two finger-length fangs poking past her lips. Her tail was wrapped around my lower body, circling me three or four times with almost crushing force. I struggled, yelping and wincing as the motion aggravated my apparently numerous injuries. Finally I managed to free my arm, and

aided by this extra leverage wriggled my way free from Cilestia's coils.

My body was a livid mass of bruises, and the two painful high places my chest suggested at least one rib had been snapped.

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Cilestia murmured something in her sleep and began slowly twining herself into a scaly knot. I started looking around for a medical kit, or failing that, a drinks cabinet. A little something to take the sharp edges off the pain seemed like a pretty good idea right then.

Something echoed quietly from outside the room. Urgent syllables muffled by the bulkhead. I shoved myself off Cilestia with my foot, sending her gently spinning and propelling me towards the room's hatch. Opening it was a simple matter of pressing the big blue button marked with the GalStandard icon for 'open'.

The door sighed gently ajar, and the muffled sentences I had heard became clear.

"*Dó hutte jep, hari mekto fum é zugzwang takik*", the announcement concluded. The Voloch language. By regulation, Earthbound ships had to repeat any announcements in English, so:

"This vessel has experienced an inadvertent precipitation from hyperspace. All passengers, please remain calm and remain in your quarters until otherwise directed..."

Chapter 4 by intellikat



I palmed my way, hand over hand to the nearest porthole. And there, to my horror and quickening pulse, was what I feared at the back of my mind when the announcement of our premature drop from hyperspace was made:

A Manny Futt Collector.

.....

Aboard the Collector, Larry Futt leaned over the command recliner, narrowed eyes and fingers playing over the scan-orb. He zoomed in on the markings of the hull and grunted.

"That's the one. Voloch transport. Fits the description the bar-wench gave us. Bring us alongside and transmit a standard boarding message. Collection protocol Z67."

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The English translation of

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"Voloach transport. This is Larry Futt of House Futt on collection mission regarding a suspected passenger aboard your transport: one David Figgers, former student and current dropout of Starfleet Academy. The amount due on Mr. Figger's account: 6.2 billion credits. We are acting in order to collect the outstanding account value of this debt. We would like to remind Mr. Figgers that the amount stated was due for payment two months ago but as no payment has been received, his invoice is now considered as overdue. The invoice and the contract between Mr. Figgers and Manny Futt is being uploaded to your ship's server at this moment for perusal. In order to avoid further escalation of this matter, please forward the payment to us and transfer the amount due within five minutes. Failure to do so will endanger the safety of your ship and crew as stated in Galactic Debt Repayment Stipulations of your contract, section H22-Sub 6. If you have any questions regarding the current situation, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are here to serve you. We are sure the problem will be solved soon, as we have no doubt in your cooperation. Yours faithfully, Larry Futt for Manny Futt Loan Association."

The transmission ended, and in the next moment, a door swished open and Bukko burst into the passageway.

"You!" xe screamed. "Hé juzdri fum é shukto klem! I kill you good!"

As the Moloch lunged for me, Cilestia appeared from her quarters behind me.

Write a draft for chapter 5 of 8 (1 draft)

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